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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 192 (2015) 364 – 370

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

2nd GLOBAL CONFERENCE on LINGUISTICS and FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING,
LINELT-2014, Dubai – United Arab Emirates, December 11 – 13, 2014

Irian EFL Teachers' Preferences For Corrective Feedback Types, implicit Vs Explicit

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Abstract

The current study aims to explore Iranian EFL teachers' preferences for oral corrective feedback; if they choose different types of feedback to correct students' phonological, grammatical and lexical errors or if they provide students with the same type of feedback for all the afore-mentioned error categories. This study also tried to investigate if teachers allow peer-feedback in their classes. And also to find out if different types of feedback are provided to students based on their proficiency levels. To do so, a questionnaire was distributed to 62 EFL Iranian teachers, to choose their preferences for feedback and the feedback provider. The results of the study showed that 43 teachers used the same type of corrective feedback for all error types, and that they preferred implicit types of corrective feedback over the explicit ones. The results also indicated that 13 teachers believed peer and self-corrections were not beneficial, and 5 teachers thought that different proficiency levels do not lead them to use different corrective feedback moves. Some teachers felt other factors might also affect their choice of feedback provider or the type of feedback they use in their classes.

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Peer-review under responsibility of Academic World Research and Education Center.

Keywords: error types, EFL teachers, corrective feedback

1. Introduction

In most developing countries, including Iran, there is a great tendency toward learning English either in language institutes or private tutorials. Knowing a second language particularly English is common among all ages and this tendency is growing fast, for different purposes such as travel, business, and improving academic writing and reading skills to name some. While the large number of institutes in large cities seems sufficient, some individuals

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enroll in private one-to-one or small-group tutorials for different reasons. However the private tutoring can be effective, it is not affordable to everyone. Despite the very high fees, those seeking private tutors, hence, seem to have strong incentives to enroll in these classes. This study aims at finding the reasons by conducting semi-structured interviews that were conducted individually.

The use of tutoring in higher education shares a long and rich history. It is an old education method that predates the existence of colleges and universities originating in Greece and Rome (Moust, and Schmidt, 1994). Early tutors were the faculty and the professionals, later private tutoring has grown up rapidly which led to a vast variation of forms of tutoring in both industrialized and less developed societies, with over one-third of pupils in some countries regularly receive private tutoring (Bray, 2007).

Private tutoring may be undertaken differently; on a one-to-one basis in different places like the house of the tutors or the tutees, in groups, large classes or even lecture theatres. It may be provided by different means such as mail, telephone or over the internet (Bray, 2007). The literature on tutoring shows that the structures and the purposes of tutoring might quite diverse (Brown, 1981; Brufee, 1980) and based on different philosophies. Researchers consider individual or one-to-one tutoring the most common (Hock, Deshler, Schumaker, 1999; Marsh, 2001), and vital in providing remedial or supplemental instruction (MacDonald, 1991), which is also the focus of the current paper. Some popular types of tutoring have been defined such as peer tutoring, group tutoring, strategy tutoring and assignment-assistance tutoring.

Although these early tutoring programs were initially given by faculty and professional tutors, peer tutoring in some societies is the norm (Cohen, 1986; Marsh, 2001; Maxwell, 1991). Peer tutoring offers some advantages over using faculty members, the most important one can be similar ages of the tutor and the tutee, as they behave like colleagues rather than appearing superior (Johansen, Martenson, and Bircher, 1992) which leads to a non-threatening environment (Dvorak, 2001). They can share information and feedback more easily (Cohen 1986) as they use similar language (Nelson, 1995/96).

Group tutoring is another type, which is the counterpart to individual or one-to-one tutoring. It is a popular format since it enables students to contribute to additional insights and questions (Dvorak, 2004), share learning strategies and promote self-sufficiency (MacDonald, 1993) and also it provides cost-savings as most of the time the budgets are reduced (MacDonald, 1993).

(Hock, 1998) stated that tutoring in which the dominant nature of the tutoring activities is aligned with the practices that primarily target the instruction in literacy skills is called instructional tutoring. In this type of tutoring model, tutors teach new knowledge and expect the students to be proficient in not-yet-mastered skills (Hock et al., 1995; Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, and Wasik, 1993).

These different types of tutoring make it difficult to determine the effectiveness of the outcomes the programs may have. In fact research has shown some controversial results, they have been used to improve learning and academic performance in societies, some researchers believe that, like every other matter, the results of private tutoring haven't all been positive.

Formalized tutoring programs were developed to assist students who needed remediation (Marsh, 2001), which did not occur until early 20th century. These programs were developed to improve academic performance (Cohen, 1996) and help students gain success even result in better performance and higher learning. Researchers believe that the opportunity provided by one-to-one tutoring can increase the impact of a variety of instructional practices and techniques (McArthur, Stasz, and Zmuidzinas, 1990). Some studies describe tutoring as the ideal teaching situation because it involves one-to-one instruction in content and skills (Bloom, 1984; Slavin et al. 1991) and provides excellent opportunity for highly skilled teachers to teach skills and strategies and content knowledge to a single student (Slavin, Kerweit, and Madden, 1989; Waick, Slavin 1990).

Other types of tutoring also may bring positive effects. Strategic tutoring model for example helps students learn the skills and fosters independent learning (Hock et al., 1995). Hock et al. have conducted a research which has shown the significant positive effects and improved the quiz scores and test performance of students in a high school algebra class. The students were able to use the strategies independently later in their math classes successfully. They also have concluded that strategic tutoring requires a level of commitment on the part of the students to apply the strategies.

ESL students have different concerns with different language backgrounds, therefore when the single student is the focus of attention of the tutor better results will arise. De Silva (1994) stated that effective private tutoring may help students overcome their learning deficiencies and build confidence which enables students to be more competent and feel more successful. Through such tutoring tutees gain more knowledge and self-confidence, and

bring national and social development.

The study on the tutoring education has shown controversial results which weren't all positive such as being harmful or unethical in some societies. Carlson (1985) stated that subject-matter tutoring by special education teachers may be unethical because students grow independent thinkers. Tucker et al. (1995) also believed that there were no student performance gains. The novice or untrained tutors, as reported by their students don't always engage students actively in the model thinking process, anchor tutoring or don't provide the tutee with the corrective feedback needed or diagnose errors (Graesser et al., 1997; Jenkins and Jenkins, 1985; McArthur, 1995).

(Bray, 2007) has even thought of tutoring effects to corrupt the educational system and the society in general. He argues that it not only lowers the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom, but also leads to corruption. He believes tutors focus their attention and effort on private tutoring rather than their classes. Or they may do their students homework. He also believes these tutors often show preferential treatment for their tutees and blackmail other students with providing their tutees with the answers to exams (Hallak, and Poisson, 2001) or by omitting certain parts of materials from curriculum to persuade students join private classes (Farah, 2012). Bray (2007) also states that too many hours spent studying has negative effects on children's mental, social and physical health. Another drawback to be addressed is that just some richer individuals can benefit from tutoring in most societies (Hallak, and Poisson, 2001; Biswal, 1999).

Although the results have not always shown positive impacts and the conditions and outcomes have found to be controversial, a considerable number of students participate in tutoring classes to gain more knowledge and contribute to social and national development. But why tutoring is more popular in some societies than others? Cultural factors, economic and educational factors can be important causes that in some societies the demand for one-to-one and small group tutoring is higher than others. Asian culture for example, places strong emphasis on effort, the perceived role of effort in educational success is one of the important causes (Salili, 1999). However European and North American cultures are more likely to emphasize ability and therefore tutoring is less popular and widespread. Another reason can be the competitiveness of schools and students (Bray, 2007), the more the competition, the more the demand for tutoring classes. Finally the low payment of teachers in some societies may be a very important factor (Bray, 2007).

Shaw (1989) had reported that students give tutors overall average rating of 4.7 out of 5, which shows that tutees were generally satisfied with this type of learning which may be due to different reasons. Yiu (1996) reported that tutors provide extra questions for students. Private tutoring also may help students build confidence and enable them compete with others (De Saliva, 1994). Research has shown that tutoring is a way to reduce the gap between what students are expected to know and to be able to do and will increase the academic and social competence (Adler, 1998; Hock et al., 1998).

Although there has been some research on tutoring and private tutoring, it seems that research on the tutee's perceptions of tutoring has been very limited. Therefore the current study explored the tutees' ideas about their reasons of enrolment in one-to-one or small group (2 to 3 students) tutoring classes to prepare for IELTS test, which are much more expensive. These students have chosen private tutoring classes rather than language institutes in Iran to enhance their language knowledge and skills and be prepared for the test. In order to glean data, some individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the reasons in more depth. The results of the study may provide some understanding of what students want and need and how better to serve them through tutorial support. And it may even help institutes serve their students in higher qualities.

The study attempts to answer the following research question:

What are the main reasons that some Iranian students choose private tutoring language classes?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

To have a rich dataset, the participants who were willing to participate were asked to take part in the individual semi-structured interview. The data was collected based on convenience sampling. 28 participants were interviewed all of whom have already had the experience of studying in language institutes. They all were the researchers' students taking tutoring classes for more than a minimum duration of 6 months. The tutorial sessions are held in the tutor's house, where the interviews also were conducted. They were aged from 27 to 50, 15 male students and 13 females, taking classes 2 sessions each week, each session lasts 90 minutes, except one who comes to this city every

2 weeks, attends 6 sessions during one week rest he has here and travels back to work. They were from different university majors, bachelor to Ph.D degree holders. They are trying to develop their English knowledge and strategies needed for standard proficiency test IELTS, for academic or immigration purposes. They were not all studying at the same levels, they were among intermediate or upper intermediate students and not beginners. As the levels of the tutees are not the same, they were not studying the same books. Reading and writing skills, along with grammar and vocabulary are taught in the tutorials, when they reach a sufficient level of proficiency test techniques follow. The interviews also took place in the tutor's house out of class hours voluntarily.

3. Instrument

The instrument used to collect data in this study as stated before is a single session one-to-one interview. As Dornyei (2012) said it is the most often used method in qualitative inquiries. The interviews were semi-structured as the format was open-ended because ready-made answers would limit the depth and the breadth of the interview (Dornyei, 2012), however; the interviewer provided some guidance and direction. The interviewer let the interviewee elaborate on the issues he/she wanted to and tried to encourage the elaboration. Before the interviews a piloting was done with 2 students who are excluded from the data. The questions of the interview were not in the same order to all participants and not with the same wording, but the questions were the same.

As the interviews were open-ended they did not all last the same. They lasted from 15 up to 37 minutes. They all were audio recorded and some notes were taken during the interview. This of course was done based on the participants' permission. The interviews were conducted in Farsi to avoid any misunderstanding and to avoid any stress on the part of the tutees. Also if they were in English in some cases tutees might not express themselves thoroughly because they did not know how to express those ideas in English. And they were told that the data will be kept confidentially and will only be used for the purpose of the research.

Later each interview was again listened to 2 times, to take some more notes and get more accurate results. The atmosphere was relaxed and non-threatening, as the tutor and the researcher were the same, the participants were told that if they have anything against private tutoring classes they can freely mention. As they had private classes the rapport between the interviewer and the interviewees had made the atmosphere a relaxed one.

4. Procedure

First of all a text message was sent to 34 students who were taking private tutoring English classes 2 days a week to see if they are eager to take part in a short interview for the purpose of research. They were told that they can choose the time of the interview and that it will be conducted in Farsi, so that they feel more comfortable and will be able to express their ideas more easily. 3 of them have not replied to the message, 3 others could not come as they worked out of town and could not manage a meeting time. Those who were eager to participate, were told that the individual interviews will be done in the house of the tutor or in a café, whatever they felt more comfortable, and that it will take 15 to 30 minutes for each participant, and it will be based on their opinions and perspectives, so there is no right or wrong answers.

They all have chosen to do the interview in the house of the tutor, morning and evening sessions were set, the interviews were audio recorded. During the interviews, sometimes they were asked for more clarification or further explanation to avoid any possible misunderstanding or ambiguities. Frequent encouragements were given so that they elaborate the issue. The atmosphere was kept friendly and not very formal. They were asked about their main incentives and reasons that made them choose private tutoring classes, and not the language institutes. And to try to avoid bias, the interviewer sometimes repeated their sentences in other words to make sure she has understood them precisely. Doing this sometimes has caused them to explain the issue in more detail. They really showed to be collaborative. At the end of the interview they were asked to talk freely about any shortcomings of the private tutoring classes.

5. Results

As mentioned before the study aimed at finding the main reasons the Iranian students have chosen private tutoring classes over institutes. Their perspectives and personal ideas were taken into account. The results have revealed that among 28 students, all have had experiences studying in language institutes and stated that they

haven't been helpful.

21 tutees thought that by coming to private classes they will learn in a much shorter time than in language institutes. However they thought this could be as a result of different factors, such as the large number of students that leads the teacher to explain every matter in detail and make sure everyone has understood. Therefore he/she cannot teach all she can. Some others stated that all students in classes are not homogeneous and teachers can teach as fast. Some of them said that they wanted to learn more intensively, which was not possible in the institutes as the teachers there have to teach the books suggested by the managers of those language centres, and they have to teach just the specified pages, not more or less. This would result in long lasting duration to learn the language.

15 cited that the private tutorial classes were preferred just because they could choose the time of classes, which is sometimes impossible to do so in institutes. They say the institutes simply have 2 or just 3 choices for each level which did not always suit them, 5 said that when they wanted to enroll in the institute there was no choice for the class days and times.

12 of the tutees have thought that they felt more comfortable taking private sessions, they said they could speak more easily and that these classes were less formal as there were less students in class. And that the teachers in institutes cannot give everyone sufficient time to speak, "there simply is no time to speak for everyone", 7 of them stated.

11 votes have been for the attention that the teacher gives individual students in private sessions. They say that "all the focus of the teacher is to what I personally need, she does not just teach the book, instead; what I need is explained to me." One of them elaborated. "When the teacher feels that she needs to spend more time on a grammatical point for example she does so, until she makes sure I have understood all that was needed, then she moves to the next step."

10 have stated that when they have gone to institutes they felt that students in one class were not all at the same level of proficiency, some were weaker and some more knowledgeable, which led to some problems. And therefore nobody could benefit optimally.

9 of the tutees addressed their friends' suggestion was their reason. As their friends have thought the classes were efficient and more useful than going to English institutes, they did so.

There were 6 of the tutees who perceived that in institutes the book is the centre in class, the students are not really important. Teachers teach the book, they don't teach for or to their students. They just do what they were told to do. They believed that in private classes the teacher works based on their own level. But in the institutes the book tells them what to teach!

5 of the tutees stated that the large number of students in each class made it uncomfortable to them. The reasons mentioned here were different. Some said they were shy to ask their questions, they were afraid to be laughed at or to be considered as a poor student. They said that he did not say anything even if he encountered problems.

There have been other reasons stated just by one or 2 of them. 2 of them said in private classes at exam times or the times they cannot attend classes they have the opportunity to cancel the class, but in institutes if they are absent more than 3 or 4 sessions they will fail. One of them said that the goal in the institutes is to pass the final exams but in the private classes the goal is learning. 2 felt that the physical setting of the environment wasn't satisfactory. 2 of them, the older ones indeed, mentioned the age difference among students was a problem, they thought they did not feel easy with high school students. One of them said in private classes tutees have to do their homework, every session they need to be prepared for everything, as there is nobody else that the tutor can ask. Another one pointed to the tuition he pays makes him study hard, not to waste the money. 2 of them said the most important factor is the teacher; he/she is the one to choose how to teach, and when to teach. Another one claimed that she has started different classes even private ones, but all lasted for a short time; she believed the rapport with the tutor was the reason she has continued her sessions this time.

6. Discussion

As stated before there have not been plenty of research on student perceptions and preferences of choosing private tutoring classes. The interview aimed at finding the reason tutees state about why tutoring sessions were their choice despite the higher tuitions they paid. Alexander (2004) also tried to find out the students ideas about tutoring classes in some part of her dissertation. Her participants however were not taking English classes, rather math was their subject. The main reason of the participants in her study was the lack of skill, which was inconsistent with the results of this study.

(Alexander, 2004) has shown that the participants identified a sense of success from tutoring in terms of how they did academically. Most students in this study also believed by private tutoring classes their academic gain will be higher, which shows consistency in the results. They said that they could master the topic better as they were engaged in the activities (Alexander, 2004), the participants of this study also believed because of the large number of students in the institutes they could not actively engage in speaking as there was not enough time given to them or they did not feel comfortable to take part.

The results were consistent with Alexander's result in some other parts too. (Alexander, 2004) also has found that one-to-one and small group tutoring sessions are within the comfort zone and therefore tends to be beneficial. It was one of the reasons 6 of the participants have voted to in this study. (Dvorak, 2001) also stated that building rapport with the tutees is an important factor in the success of private sessions.

The results of this study also were consistent with the previous results that tutoring increases the effectiveness and efficiency of learning, as the student has a chance to interact with the material (Topping, 1996; Gardner, and Jeweler, 1996). (Griffen, 2001; Graesser et al. (2002) also believe that private tutoring classes engage students more actively in the process of learning which will lead to higher efficiency of learning. The previous research also has shown that students in private classes ask for greater clarification which leads to their success (Mc Keller, 1986), this also was mentioned by some students in this study.

(Donald, 2004) has shown in his study that tutors help their students create self-sufficiency. This item was not mentioned by any of the participants of this study. The results of this study however have been inconsistent with the previous research saying that learning styles of different students and the teacher's sensitivity to the styles can be important factor to students (Mac Donald, 2004). None of the tutees in this study have talked about personal styles or characters.

The study had some limitations due to the certain educational conditions in Iran. The conditions are for sure different in other countries. And the results might be generalized to Iranian students. Another limitation is that the tutor had interviewed her own students and not tutees of other teachers. The results might be so just for English not for other subject matters.

The results can be used to develop the situations of the language institutes, and to address some of the shortcomings they are mentioned by the students in this study, for example by reducing the number of students in each class or ask the teachers to pay more attention to the personal needs of the students, and also to encourage students to speak more frequently. Also private tutors or the teachers who might wish to have private tutees for the financial gain can get some helpful ideas.

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